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REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE SCOPE AND METHOD OF THE TWELFTH CENSUS.

The Association at its Cleveland meeting in December, 1897, authorized the appointment of a Committee to inquire into the scope and method of the eleventh census, with a view of determining what ought to be attempted at the next. This Committee was duly appointed, and begs to report as follows :¹

The Committee determined to undertake a review of the eleventh census; and for this purpose it invited various members of the Association and others to coöperate by preparing critical articles on particular portions of the census. In order to extend this coöperation still further, and especially to discover what might seem weak points in the eleventh census, and inquiries desirable to be elaborated in the twelfth, it addressed a circular letter to all the members of the Association asking them to reply to certain questions.²

¹ Presented to the Association, December 28, 1898.

² The letter was as follows :

DEAR SIR :—At the meeting of the Association in Cleveland, Dec. 29–31, 1897, a committee was appointed to consider *The Scope and Method of the Twelfth Census*. The committee proposes to make a study of the methods and results of the last census for the purpose of suggesting what may reasonably be expected from the next. The effort, however, will be constructive rather than destructive, its chief object being to form an intelligent public opinion upon this important scientific undertaking,—the most important of the kind in the world. The committee has secured the coöperation of a number of members of the Association interested in particular portions of the subject. An analysis will be made of the more important topics of census inquiry, under the following heads :—

The circular letter was not successful; only about sixty replies were received. Doubtless many members of the Association, while interested in the census, did not consider it worth while to answer the inquiries unless they had some specific criticism or recommendation to make. Some replies were of considerable value in pointing out errors in the eleventh census and making suggestions for the twelfth, and they have been utilized by the committee and by the persons making special reports. A brief digest of them will be prepared by the Committee to accompany the papers if they are published in monograph form.

On the other hand, the invitation to coöperate with the Committee in carefully reviewing certain portions

- a. Methods and results of the last census.
- b. Scope and method of the twelfth census.
- c. Experience of other countries, references and bibliography.

These studies will be edited by the committee, reported upon at the next meeting of the Association, discussed, and (if the Association approve) the whole printed as a monograph. It is believed that such a work will furnish a basis for scientific judgment, will concentrate intelligent opinion upon the census and be a contribution of permanent value to the science of statistics.

The committee respectfully asks your coöperation in this undertaking by answering the questions on the accompanying sheet and making such other suggestions as you may deem important. All replies will be treated as confidential and they need not be signed.

Very truly yours,

RICHMOND MAYO-SMITH,
WALTER F. WILLCOX,
CARROLL D. WRIGHT,
ROLAND P. FALKNER,
DAVIS R. DEWEY,

Committee.

(a) Have you made use of the eleventh census and if so, of the Abstract, Compendium or Quarto Volumes? (b) Which volumes or parts have you found most useful? (c) Have you detected any gross errors in the eleventh census and if so, what are they? (d) Is there any special information which you think might be furnished by the twelfth census and which is not in the eleventh census?

of the census work met with the heartiest response. The result is a series of papers by independent authors upon specific topics which together constitute a very valuable commentary upon the federal census and statistical method in general. The Committee made no effort to supervise these contributions, even to the extent of securing uniformity of treatment or proportionate length. Nor did the variety of topics demand the same kind of treatment. Each author was obliged, therefore, to interpret, according to his own notions, the general plan of the Committee as outlined in their letter, and to carry it out as the nature of the subject allowed. While the essays vary in length and in method yet each will be found complete in itself and following the central idea, viz. : a review of the method and results of the eleventh census with a view to furnishing suggestions regarding the scope and method of the next. Each author is responsible for his own assertions, both of fact and opinion, and in no case should the Committee be held to indorse the views or conclusions of the contributors. The Committee believes, however, that all the essays have been written without personal bias or prejudice and with a sincere desire to advance the interests of science and of good statistical method in our census work.

The Committee has not considered critically all the points raised in these elaborate papers but submits the following general conclusions :

I. Throughout the papers, there is criticism not so much of the accuracy of the census returns as of the treatment of the data and of a lack of continuity from census to census. Both defects we believe to be largely due to the insufficient time allowed by law for preparing plans and schedules. Among the most effective means of overcoming these difficulties are the establishment of

a permanent census organization, which this association has already advocated, and its subordination to civil service rules.

II. The Committee believes that the work of the census is seriously impeded by the number and variety of the investigations ordered, and that in consequence fundamental inquiries cannot receive adequate attention. A number of subordinate inquiries might advantageously be transferred to established bureaus or departments which are equipped with expert agents and some of which now publish annual volumes of kindred statistics. By this means the duplication of reports would be avoided or minimized ; and with legislation giving such offices power and means to secure adequate returns, the results would be more satisfactory. The following subjects might be transferred to the offices named : Irrigation to the Department of Agriculture or the Geological Survey ; Fisheries to the Fish Commission ; Mineral Industries to the Geological Survey ; Land Transportation to the Interstate Commerce Commission ; Water Transportation to the proper bureau of the Treasury Department ; Statistics of Schools to the Bureau of Education ; Indians (except their enumeration) to the Bureau of Indian Affairs ; Real Estate Mortgages to the Department of Labor.

III. The following analysis of various classes of defects or weaknesses in method which have been emphasized by the writers of the papers may be suggestive.

1. The lack of comparability in the data from census to census. This is not in itself a defect provided that the successive census enumerations represent improvement. It is discussed in several places as follows : the grouping of occupations, especially the inclusion of miners first under manufactures, then under agriculture ;

the classification changes also in minor points. (Mayo-Smith); the impossibility of comparing employment of children in the tenth and eleventh censuses on account of the different age classification. (Mayo-Smith); in the statistics of manufactures, changes in the definition of capital. (North); differences in methods of estimating national wealth. (Plehn).

2. The lack of co-ordination. After the census of population, the most important work of the census is devoted to statistics of the productive industries—agriculture, manufactures, mining, and fisheries. These inquiries should be more closely associated in method of presentation with one another, so that more of the facts available in one might be available in the others, as for instance the number of persons employed, the capital invested, the wages paid, etc. A still further lack of uniformity is found in the methods of tabulation pursued in the different volumes. The general geographical groupings of the states adopted in the volumes on Population should be preserved throughout the other volumes, with special groupings for particular conditions. The lack is also seen in the relation of different branches of investigation. For instance, facts are asked with regard to criminals which are not asked in regard to the general population. (Falkner). The statistics of school attendance are not adequately compared with similar statistics published in the monograph on Education. (Dewey). Figures for persons employed in manufacture given in the occupation statistics do not accord with those given in the volume on Manufactures. (North).

3. Faults of Method.

a. Certain investigations relating to matters of the greatest interest fail to give adequate results because the

basis of the inquiry is at fault. In this class belong all attempts to secure the annual rate for crime, births, and deaths by direct enumeration at a given time without recourse to registration or other continuous records. (Falkner, Wilbur, Fisher). The inquiry as to months unemployed during the census year is of a similar character. (Mayo-Smith).

b. Questions which cannot be answered, such as degree of intermixture of white and negro blood. (Ripley).

c. The tabulations are in some cases omitted, in some defective, and in some over-elaborated, *e. g.*, relation to head of family (Holmes), language of those who do not speak English (Dewey), nativities of the foreign-born illiterate (Dewey), number of the dependents in relation to those employed (Mayo-Smith).

d. There are certain faults of classification which are found in both schedules and tabulations, *e. g.*, statistics of occupations, especially distribution of "laborers not specified" (Mayo-Smith), classification of the size of farms (Stone), statistics of taxation and wealth (Plehn), municipal receipts and expenditures (Gardner).

4. Faults in the textual analysis of the figures. Analyses which attempt to show cost of production or the relation of capital to product, or an average wage (North, Steuart, Ford, Bullock). Comparisons which disregard the varying sex and age constitution of the different sections of the country and the different elements of the population, *e. g.*, for crime (Falkner), education (Dewey), pauperism (Lindsay), occupations (Mayo-Smith), registration and non-registration areas (Wilbur).

IV. The Committee congratulates itself and the Association upon this noteworthy collection of papers,

the result of the scientific zeal and effort of so many men. It would recommend to the Association the immediate publication of the same as a Monograph,¹ and believes that such publication will bring honor on the Association and will advance science.

RICHMOND MAYO-SMITH,
WALTER F. WILLCOX,
CARROLL D. WRIGHT,
ROLAND P. FALKNER,
DAVIS R. DEWEY,

Committee.

¹ At the meeting of the Association, December 27-29, 1898, to which this report was presented, it was resolved by the Council to print the papers as a Monograph, and in fulfillment of that order the present work is published.